



# The Blue Sheet

## Practical Application of Iowa's Blueprint for Permanency Ideas for Foster Parents

***Every child deserves a forever family!*** Achieving permanence requires an unequivocal commitment from all sectors to ensure that every young person served by Iowa's child welfare and juvenile justice systems leaves those systems with safe, loving, and enduring relationships that are intended to last forever.

***Iowa's Blueprint for Forever Families 2011*** presents a framework and recommendations to guide permanency efforts. Moreover, it is a ***call to action*** for all partners to contribute to achieving permanence for children and youth.

**This supplement to the *Blueprint* builds on ideas generated at the May 2011 Children's Justice Permanency Summit. It identifies concrete actions that you, in your role as a foster parent, can incorporate in your daily work to help achieve permanence for these children and youth.**

### Family and Youth Engagement

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***Every family and youth should have a voice.*** Outcomes improve when youth and their parents are active participants in their own planning and service provision. When parents are empowered, guided, and supported in their parenting efforts, and when youth's opinions are valued and fostered, lines of communication open up and more candid conversations about issues and barriers to safe case closure can be dealt with in a strength-based environment.

#### **What you can do...**

- ☐ Take advantage of training and IFAPA's booklets to make sure I understand the importance of family and how I can assist in continuing connections with the child's family
  - Work with the birth parents, being a role model, and include parents in the decisions, appointments, and support and assist with family interactions
- ☐ Provide information to the workers about the child's and our schedule and events so the family interactions, therapy and meetings are scheduled to permit attendance is possible
- ☐ Ask the IFAPA Peer Liaison to provide ideas for communication to maintain connections between the youth and family
- ☐ Become familiar and participate with AMP (Achieving Maximum Potential) activities if I have a youth over 13 who would like to participate.
- ☐ Attend the court hearings if possible and ensure that the youth has the opportunity to attend "their" court hearing.

### Family Preservation

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***First and foremost children belong with their birth families.*** In most cases, children and youth are best served by preserving and supporting families. Family preservation efforts include short-term, family-based services designed to assist families in crisis by improving parenting and family functioning while keeping

children and communities safe. In juvenile justice, diversion strategies and home-based services recognize that youth can be rehabilitated and communities can be safe without separating youth and their families.

## **Placement and Reunification**

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*Regardless of the reason, children are traumatized by removals from their home.* When out-of-home placement is necessary, it is critical for everyone involved to engage immediately, adopt a sense of urgency, and utilize all services and individuals connected to the family to launch the reunification process. When reunification is not possible, it is critical to ensure that the youth is connected to at least one committed relationship with another loving, caring adult.

### **What you can do...**

- ☐ Assist with an initial visitation with a birth parent within 24-48 hours of placement
- ☐ Include parents in decisions, appointments, and support family interaction to assist in reunification
- ☐ Attend Family Team Meetings, Court hearings, and staffings related to the child placed in my home
- ☐ Assist the child in maintaining connections with their family, relatives and community
- ☐ Continue “mentoring” birth parents after the child has reunified with their parents to help keep the family unit intact

## **Adoption and Guardianship**

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*Children in out of home placement who cannot be reunified need permanency.* Adoption and guardianship are preferred permanency options as opposed to long-term foster care. All children and youth can be adopted regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, special need or sibling group size. When individual circumstances determine that adoption is not the best option, guardianship is another avenue to permanency.

### **What you can do...**

- ☐ Assist with recruitment of adoptive parents for the special needs children
- ☐ Assist with the positive transition to an adoptive home from my home maintaining contact with the child and assisting adoptive parents with information to help them better parent the child
- ☐ Attend training that will help our family transition from a foster parent to an adoptive parent

## **Transitioning to Adulthood**

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*It is never too late to achieve permanence.* Older youth face a unique set of challenges and risks as they move into adulthood. When youth age-out of foster care they often lack the financial, emotional, educational, and protective support typically provided to young people in permanent, intact families. Permanence remains a vital and critical need for these young adults.

### **What you can do...**

- ☐ Attend training and ask for support on ways to assist a youth who is transitioning out of care
- ☐ Consider being an ongoing support person for a youth who transitions from care and discuss with the youth your ability and willingness to be available after he or she turns 18
- ☐ Promote the work of AMP and other youth initiatives; assist the youth in learning about getting involved
- ☐ Provide opportunities for the youth in my home to learn skills to live on their own